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Title: The Women of Project Y - A Snapshot of Women at Wartime Los Alamos

Description: 20 slides featuring historical women at LANL written by Madeline Whitacre, Laura McGuinness, and Heather Hershey

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# NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH CENTER



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# The Women of Project Y

## A Snapshot of Women at Wartime Los Alamos



**Madeline Whitacre**

**Laura McGuinness**

**Heather Hershey**

March 30, 2021



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# Women and Wartime Los Alamos

Madeline Whitacre, NSRC Staff





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# Women at Manhattan Project Los Alamos



- 11% of the workforce at the wartime Laboratory were women
- 40% of women working at the Laboratory were members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC)



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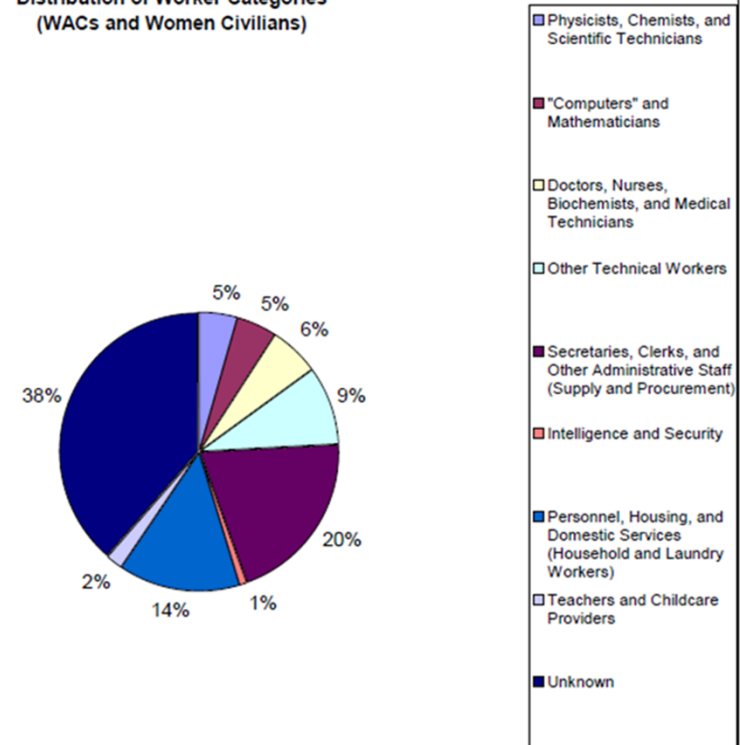
# Women at Manhattan Project Los Alamos



*“Some of the wives were scientists in their own right, and they, of course, were in great demand, but with labor at a premium we could put to good use everyone we could get, whether as secretaries or as technical assistants or as teachers in the public school that we started for children.”*

**—General Leslie Groves**

**Distribution of Worker Categories  
(WACs and Women Civilians)**



The Women of Project Y: Working at the Birthplace of the Bomb  
— Ellen McGehee



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# Women at Manhattan Project Los Alamos



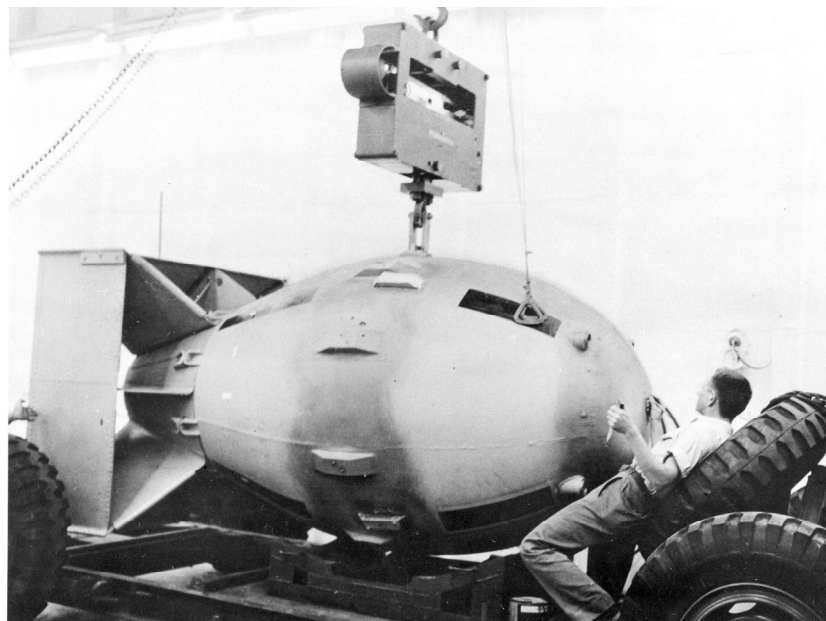
Lilli S. Hornig



Charlotte Serber

*"To have been a working entity on the Project is something we [the women of Los Alamos] don't forget easily. Even at the time, it was impressive. We were doing a war job in a period when people were needed badly."*

—Charlotte Serber





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# Miriam White Campbell

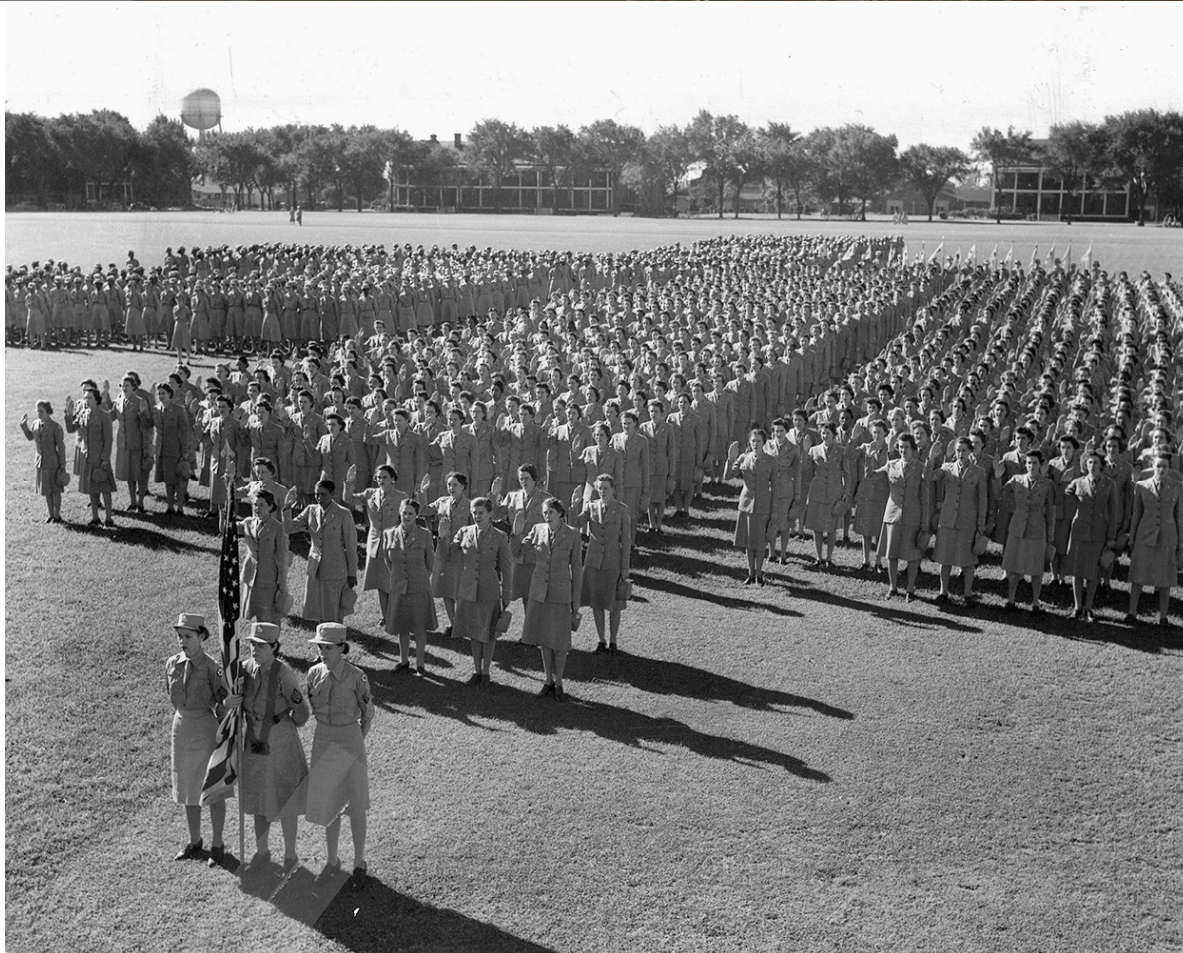
Laura McGuinness, NSRC Staff





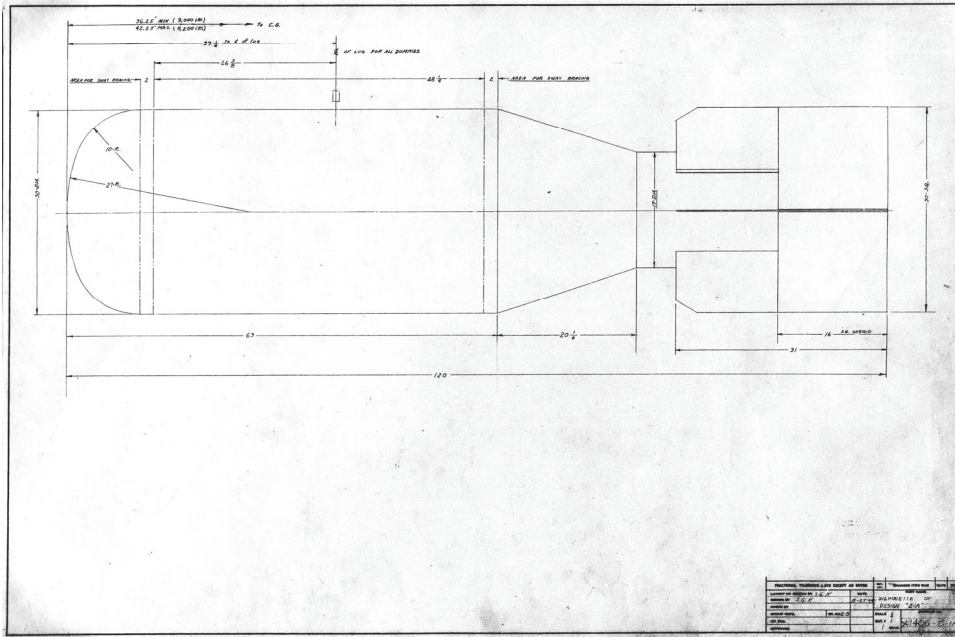
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# Miriam White Campbell



**"I could draw  
anything they wanted,  
and I did."**

## Drawing Little Boy



**A uranium, gun-type atomic weapon;  
9,700 pounds, 10-feet long, and just over  
2-feet in diameter.**

“I didn’t know the physics.  
Just how to draw. And my  
training in drawing was  
architectural. I suppose now  
it would all be done on the  
computer, but at that time  
somebody had to take a  
pencil or pen and draw  
everything.”

—Miriam White Campbell

Note: These blueprints were not drawn by Miriam White Campbell, but are the same subject.



# Life at the Lab

“I not only drew it, I cut out drawings, isometric drawings, and cut it out so you could see everything in the bomb.”

2089 1330

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RE: Receipt of CLASSIFIED Material.

Original to be signed personally by the recipient and returned to the sender.  
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I have personally received from (sender) Capt. R.C. Smith  
P. O. Box 1663, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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CLASS (Secret, Confidential)	DESCRIPTION Nature* (Letter, Report, etc.)	FROM	ADDRESSED TO	DATED
Secret	3 sheets of drawings S-1214	RCS	JTS	16 May 44

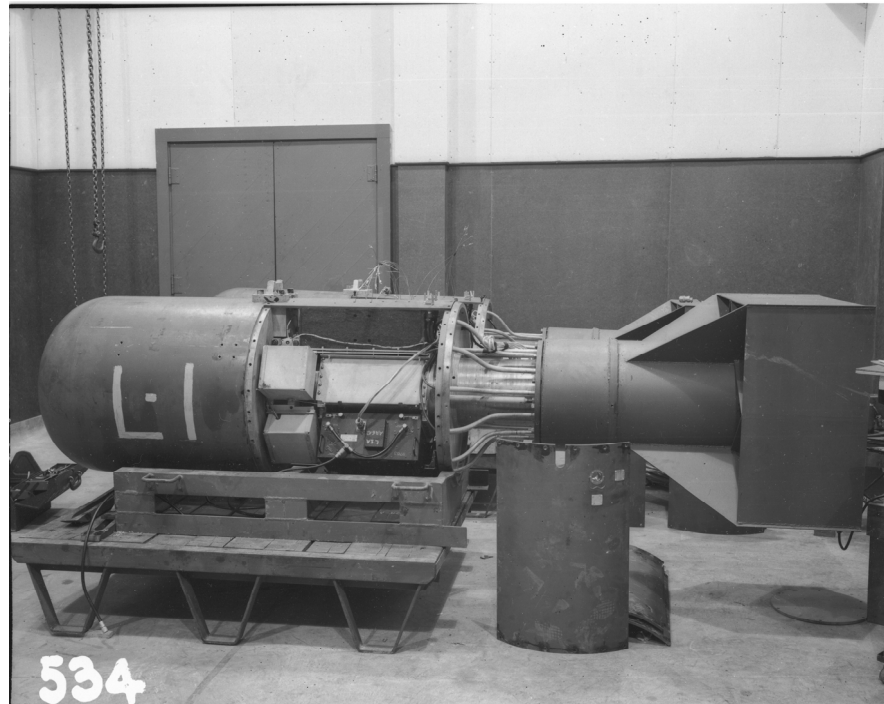
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Minis White (signature)  
16 May 44 (date)

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## Miriam's Drawings Actualized



**“If we needed something, we had it.”**

**—Miriam White Campbell discusses the Lab’s commitment to providing the necessary tools for the completion of Little Boy.**



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# Maria Goeppert Mayer

Heather Hershey, NSRC Staff

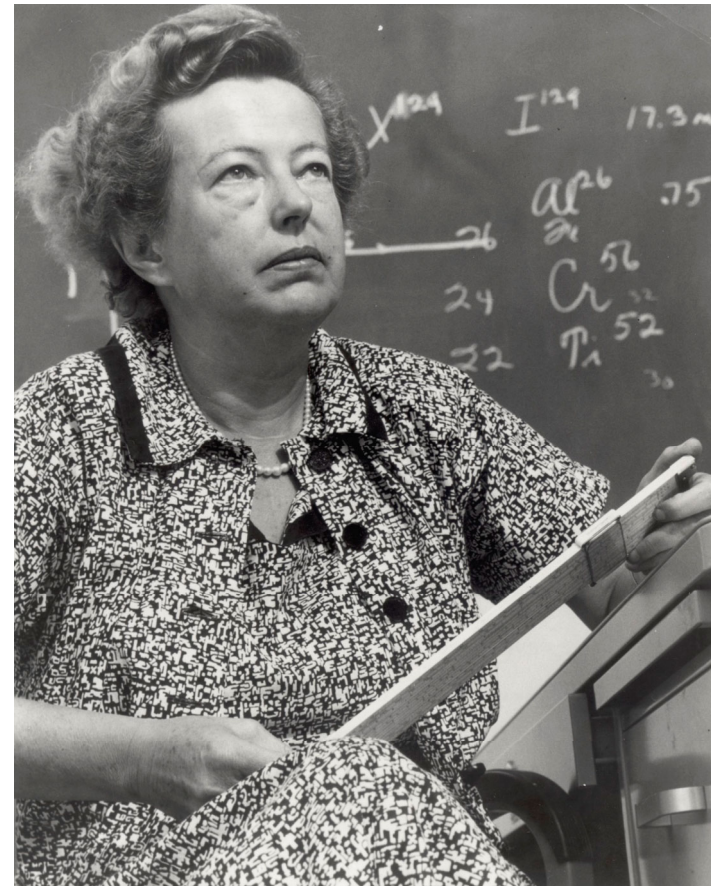




## Early Years

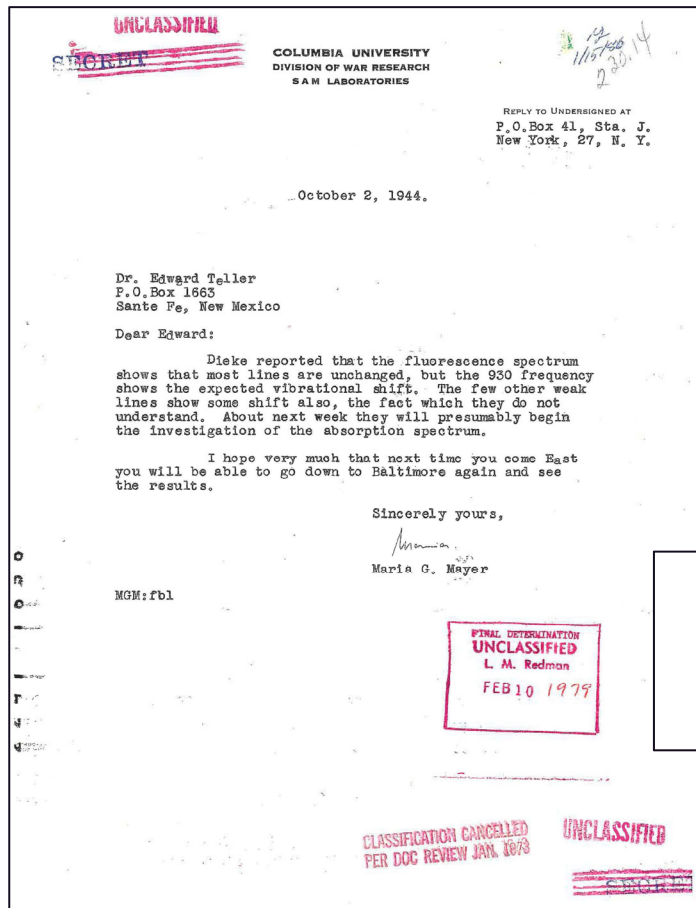


- June 28, **1906**: Born in Kattowitz, Germany (now Katowice, Poland)
- **1910**: Family moved to Göttingen, Germany
- **1924**: Entered Göttingen University to study mathematics
  - Changed to theoretical physics after attending quantum mechanics seminar
- **1930**: Received a PhD in theoretical physics. Married Joe Mayer and moved to Baltimore, Maryland
- **1939**: Moved to New York, Columbia University volunteer lecturer



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# Los Alamos Connection



- **1943:** Substitute Alloy Materials (SAM) Laboratories at Columbia
  - Uranium isotope separation
  - Opacity Project
- **1945:** Arrived on the Hill to work with Edward Teller
  - Opacity Project

Sincerely yours,

Maria G. Mayer



## Post-War Career



- **1946:** Argonne National Laboratory in Chicago
  - Developed nuclear shell model
- **1960:** Professor of physics University of California at San Diego
  - First full professorship
- **1963:** Awarded Nobel Prize in Physics

“Winning the prize wasn’t half as exciting as doing the work itself.”

### *S.D. Mother Wins Nobel Physics Prize*

Dr. Mayer 1st Woman in U.S.,  
2nd in History So Honored

By FRANK HOGAN





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## Maria Goeppert Mayer



“Become fully educated women and promote the understanding of science in any way you can. Our country needs your help. My generation has played its part. It is up to you to carry on.”

—Maria Goeppert Mayer via the *Scientific American*, shortly before her death in 1972



## Contact us



Get your own Women of Project Y  
posters!

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or check with the Lab's Print Shop.

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